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Kremlinology: New Sense of Urgency

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 4 — Secretary of State George P. Shultz said recently that after many briefings on the succession struggle in the Soviet Union he was convinced that nobody really knew what was going to happen in the Kremlin when Leonid I. Brezhnev was replaced.

But even though no one may be certain about the future, a handful of Kremlinologists at the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department are nevertheless struggling to put together a well-reasoned guess as to who the next Soviet leader or leaders will be and what subsequent policies might mean or not mean for the United States.

There is a sense of urgency about the work because there is a widespread sense of anticipation in Moscow and here that Mr. Brezhnev, who will be 76 years old next month and is in poor health, is not long for the job. As a result, Kremlinologists, who have been working in recent years without the higher echelons of Government particularly caring about their labors, suddenly find fresh demand for their analyses.

In the world of intelligence, Kremlinology is a rather rarefied specialty practiced mostly by a few longtime followers of the Soviet Union, who live and breathe Soviet trivia. Some of them, in fact, are veritable walking encyclopedias whose knowledge cannot be replaced easily. When the C.I.A. carried out purges five years ago to save money, some of the most experienced specialists were sent into retirement and, according to the few veterans left, have not been satisfactorily replaced.

Analyses Hedged Heavily

For Kremlinologists, there are no modern gimmicks and aides such as photo reconnaissance satellites. They do their work by studying a vast array of Soviet publications, analyzing every speech by a top leader and keeping lists of when a particular official was last seen in public. They take note of diplomatic gossip in Moscow and other world capitals, and they interview recent defectors.

Predictably, their analyses are often hedged heavily. In the end, they frequently rely on their intuition.

Probably, the most respected Kremlinologist in the United States Government is Paul K. Cook, who has worked in the intelligence and research bureau of the State Department for more than two decades, taking time out for a two-year tour in the United States Embassy in Moscow.

"Our prediction rate in recent years is not good," he said in an article prepared for publication in a forthcoming Congressional study on the Soviet Union's economy in the 1980's. He noted that after Stalin died in 1953, the top Soviet watchers in the United States Government dismissed Nikita S. Khrushchev as "a faceless bureaucrat." At that time, the Kremlinologists believed that Georgi M. Malenkov, who was part of a triumvirate with Mr. Khrushchev and Nikolai A. Bulganin, would emerge on top.

A few days before Mr. Khrushchev was ousted by his colleagues in October 1964, a State Department report said he was in stronger shape politically than at any time in recent months. And then, when Mr. Khrushchev was replaced by a "troika" consisting of Mr. Brezhnev, Nikolai V. Podgorny and Aleksei N. Kosygin, the Kremlinologists in Washington dismissed Mr. Brezhnev's chances.

Llewellyn E. Thompson, then the top Soviet watcher in Washington, told a press briefing that the triumvirate could not hold together long and that Mr. Podgorny would emerge on top. In fact, it did last until 1971 when Mr. Brezhnev clearly became the first among equals.

The leading Kremlinologists are not known to the public as a rule. The exceptions were Mr. Thompson, who served two tours as Ambassador to Moscow, Charles E. Bohlen, who was Ambassador to Moscow and interpreted for Franklin D. Roosevelt when he met with Stalin, and George F. Kennan, who had a long tour in Moscow as deputy to W. Averell Harriman and a short time as Ambassador himself.

Among those cited as the best Kremlinologists by experts in the field, besides Mr. Cook, are Donald

Graves, who is the State Department's specialist on internal Soviet affairs, and three retired C.I.A. analysts, Marion Shaw, John Whitman and John Huyzenga.

For Kremlinologists, this weekend is an important occasion. On Saturday there will be a Kremlin rally and on Sunday there will be the traditional military parade through Red Square, honoring the anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. It is a time when the Politburo turns out en masse and is photographed as a group, giving Kremlinologists a few extra facts.

For instance, Andrei P. Kirilenko, who is 76 and a longtime heir apparent to Mr. Brezhnev, has dropped out of public sight. Further, his name was missing from an obituary signed by the rest of the Politburo on Oct. 5., leading to speculation that he was out of the running. But if Mr. Kirilenko appears with the rest of the Politburo on Sunday, his name will have to be reconsidered.

Besides Mr. Kirilenko, the main candidates of the Kremlinologists to replace Mr. Brezhnev as the Communist party leader are Yuri V. Andropov, 68, the former head of the K.G.B., who Mr. Cook said is the "conventional wisdom favorite;" Konstantin U. Chernenko, 70, a protégé of Mr. Brezhnev for many years, but who, Mr. Cook said, "may have generated opposition by moving too quickly to assume power," and Viktor V. Grishin, 67, the party chief of the city of Moscow, who is the dark horse because he lacks any experience at the national party level.